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PHSB STUDIES

JUL 23 1979

A Special Report Series by the N.C. Department of Human Resources, Division of Health Services, Public Health Statistics Branch, P.O. Box 2091, Raleigh, N.C.

No. 15

June 1979

Perspective Health Status of American Indians in North Carolina

At the request of the North Carolina Commission for Indian Affairs, the Public Health Statistics Branch recently undertook analysis of race-specific natality and mortality data collected by the Division of Health Services. The purpose of the present report is to highlight those findings for the information of other researchers interested in the health status of N.C. minority groups.

Due to the small size of non-black minority groups in North Carolina, the PHSB traditionally reports data for whites and nonwhites only. However, the number of Indian residents was deemed sufficiently large to allow for the present analysis, our one large problem being lack of population bases to compute rates. Unfortunately, other non-black minority groups in North Carolina include too few residents for comparable analysis.

In order that this project be accomplished at minimum expense, existing data were heavily utilized. Hence, time frames and race categories are not consistent across all types of data.

Population Characteristics

At the time of the 1970 Census (which is thought to involve undercounts), American Indian residents numbered 44,406 to represent 0.9% of the total N.C. population. Sixty percent lived in Robeson County and accounted for 31% of that county's total population. Other counties with sizable Indian populations include Columbus, Cumberland, Hoke, Jackson, Scotland and Swain.

The following percentages apply to socio-demographic characteristics of persons enumerated by the Census. Unfortunately, Indian counts are seldom shown separately in published data.

	Whites	Blacks	Indians and Other Races*
Percent persons living in rural places	56	51	83
Percent persons less than poverty level	13	45	42
Percent families less than poverty level	11	39	38
Percent persons 25+ to complete 4 years high school or more	42	23	27
Percent females 15-44 to complete 4 years high school or more	56	37	36
Percent households living in owner- occupied unit	66	46	49
Percent families headed by a female	9	25	17
Percent workers among women 16+ with preschoolers	43	54	41
Percent disabled among persons 16-64	12	15	13
Percent persons 5+ living in same county as in 1965	23	29	32
Percent persons under age 18	32	43	44
Percent persons 65 or older	9	7	4
Median age	28.2	21.3	20.9

*Except for rurality which was reported separately for Indians, Indians constitute 88% of this group on the average.